

:: GRANT WAHLQUIST GALLERY

Tad Beck: Scrying

9/11/24 – 11/16/24

Grant Wahlquist Gallery is thrilled to announce “Scrying,” an exhibition of new works by Tad Beck. The show runs from September 11 – November 16, 2024. **Please join us for a reception with the artist Friday, September 20th, from 5 – 8 pm.**

The artist’s fourth solo presentation with the gallery, “Scrying” is a body of interrelated works in photography, video installation, and sculpture that explore the complex relationship between photography, memory, and the occult. “Scrying” models Beck’s structuralist relationship to the camera—his commitment to stretching or extending the camera’s capacities and attributes to test what a photograph is or can do—activated here through an investigation of his own childhood toys, loves, and fears. Joining the artist’s formal and conceptual concerns with some of the most unabashedly personal subject matter of his *oeuvre* to date, the exhibition is among the artist’s most sophisticated, yet also most accessible, and a triumph of retinal pleasure and psychological depth.

Taking its name from the divinatory practice of gazing into a medium from which revelation may arise—a crystal ball, a mirror—“Scrying” began with a series of photographs drawing on Beck’s childhood delight in gazing through glass marbles, which he recently came to consider a primal experience of the satisfaction of experiencing objects and scenes through a lens. Making use of his longstanding practice of (re-)photographing images through refractive surfaces and substances, Beck photographed images of his beloved childhood toys through those very same marbles, generating inverted and distorted portraits of these cherished effects. Paying homage to the work of his teacher Mike Kelley, Beck marries Kelley’s use of stuffed animals as symbols for cultural practices and psychological phenomena with his own photographic methods. Perennially stimulated by questions of artistic influence and legacy, Beck places these images in brightly colored, painted frames in a fashion clearly inspired by Sarah Charlesworth’s 1983-1988 series “Objects of Desire.” As the writer David O’Neill wrote of Charlesworth’s work, this body of photographs by Beck are “deceptive and honest, universal and personal, alienating and beckoning.”

These photographs are displayed alongside a two-channel video installation presented on vintage projection screens surrounded by vintage chairs. Sharing its title with the exhibition as a whole, *Scrying* features two of Beck’s childhood hand puppets, one sporting a wizard’s hat in front of an array of seemingly occult objects, the other in front of a bookshelf displaying texts and catalogues on the work of Beck’s artistic forebears (Kelley, Charlesworth, Zoe Leonard, Roni Horn, and more). These two characters engage in what at first appears to be a discourse on the nature of divination, as the lines spoken by the puppet in the wizard’s hat are in fact appropriated from online scrying tutorials. However, students of the history of photography will quickly observe that the lines spoken by the yellow puppet in front of the bookcase are modifications of quotes from seminal 20th Century texts on the history and meaning of photography, from Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida* to Susan Sontag’s *On Photography* to Jack Kerouac’s introduction to Robert Frank’s *The Americans*. Accompanied by a commissioned score by Kevin Kenkel whose tones echo in the gallery, *Scrying* both informs and expands on the viewer’s experience of the exhibition as a whole.

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Finally, as if to oppose Barthes's assertion that there is "nothing Proustian in a photograph," "Scrying" contains a wall-mounted sculpture by Beck that pays homage to Marcel Proust's ruminations on memory and childhood, his famous remembrance of consuming a madeleine as a child in *In Search of Lost Time* in particular. In that passage, the protagonist's consumption of a madeleine conjures a series of memories from childhood at his Aunt Léonie's house that becomes a reflection on "the vast structure of recollection." In the process of developing this exhibition Beck discovered a photograph of the interior of The House of Aunt Léonie-Musée Marcel Proust in Illiers-Combray with a striking formation of plates mounted to the wall. Imagining that Proust might have sat in front of this array of plates as a child while consuming madeleines, Beck collected an identical number of vintage souvenir plates from places he has lived over the course of his life; these plates were painted with a chrome finish that obscures if not completely eliminates their underlying imagery, turning them into an array of scrying mirrors in the exact same formation as the plates in Léonie's house in Illiers-Combray. Simultaneously a self-portrait, a work of quasi-minimalist sculpture, and an inversion of the lenses present in the related photographs, this work embodies Proust's speculation that "[t]he past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) which we do not suspect. And as for that object, it depends on chance whether we come upon it or not before we ourselves must die."

Tad Beck received a B.F.A. in Photography from the School of Visual Arts, New York and an M.F.A. in Fine Art from Art Center College of Design, Pasadena. He lives in Vinalhaven, Maine. Beck's solo exhibitions include: the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Fisher Center at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; Samuel Freeman Gallery, Los Angeles; Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (two-person exhibition with Jennifer Locke); Samuel Freeman Gallery, Los Angeles; Marisa Del Re Gallery, New York; Nathalie Karg Gallery, New York; and the Center for Maine Contemporary Art. His work has been featured in group exhibitions at numerous museums and galleries including: the Institute for Contemporary Art, Portland, Maine; the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut; the Center for Maine Contemporary Art; FotoFest, Houston; Spritmuseum, Stockholm; the Addison Gallery of American Art, Andover, Massachusetts; the Portland Museum of Art, Maine; and the Worcester Art Museum, Massachusetts. His work is in the collections of the Addison Gallery of American Art; the Farnsworth Art Museum, Rockland, Maine; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the Princeton Museum of Art; the Portland Museum of Art; the Wadsworth Atheneum; and the Worcester Art Museum.

The gallery is located at 30 City Center, Portland, Maine. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 11 am to 6 pm, and by appointment. For more information, visit <http://grantwahlquist.com>, call 207.245.5732, or email info@grantwahlquist.com.